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# **GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA**

**TEACHING OF THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1975-1979)**

**REPORT**

**CLASSROOM FORUM ON**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE HISTOY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA  
(1975-1979)**

**PREK ENG HIGH SCHOOL**

**17 JUNE 2016**

**TEAM:**

**PHENG PONG-RASY**

**MIN SANAS**

**ANAMAY VISWANATHAN**

**VENG SEANGHAI**





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## I. Overall Summary

The 13<sup>th</sup> education forum on the importance of studying Khmer Rouge legacy was conducted in PrekEng high school lying opposite of PrekEng pagoda, about 11 kilometers from Phnom Penh. Needless to mention, it was surprising that we had to take about one hour to just to get that short destination due to traffic congestion and progressive road construction, but the Genocide Education team were not tired to go forward with the sense of readiness.

Crawling down pass the main entrance, the van of the working team was running cross the peaceful and quiet environment of the school where some students were sitting their lesson in the class; some were heading back home after break time. Exclusively, students in a group of 53 (32 females/21 males) were already waiting for the team inside a classroom well-prepared by the school directors and his staff with amplifiers and speakers and a table covered by beautiful mattress. Such the good preparation and mutual collaboration allowed the forum to flow in line with our timeframe scheduled from 9 AM to 11 AM, which was a huge satisfaction. It was an awe-inspiring precursor to the encouragement for the Genocide Education team especially Mr. Rasyto do presentation.

Softened by their welcoming smiles and expression of enthusiasm to learn, Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy gave the opening speech and, without delay, continued to pre-forum survey session. The survey purposefully was designed to ascertain the students' pre-existing knowledge and experiences about Khmer Rouge legacy orally told by their parents or informed by certain means. Behind the survey was another interesting transition called K-W-L method which required Mr, Rasy to note students' existing *knowledge* down the whiteboard, followed by what they want to *know* further than the knowledge[*more details of K-W-L will be discussed in another section below*].

A short video film *AnlongVeng Peace Tour* was played afterward, allowing students to be aware of the Khmer Rouge last stronghold being used as peace building endeavor through an initiative called AnlongVeng Peace Tour. Finally the forum was ended with distribution of textbooks“*The*





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*History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*” to all participants. The book distribution was aimed at encouraging students to further read and research on Khmer Rouge history on a larger scale in addition with building students’ reading habit. In addition to hardcopy readings, the team also provided students with palm notes consisting of websites necessary to their self-study and research. Those links include *DC-Cam websites, ECCC, Searching for the Truth (Khmer and English), SleukRith Institute, and the Cambodian Law and Policy Journal*. The main reason behind website slip distribution is upon availability of electric internet-based devices. Additionally, if interested to see a documentary film or read books, students are encouraged to go to DC-Cam as seen in the note. The forum ended with goodbye smiles of satisfaction.

## II. Introduction to the Forum and Objectives

With a focus on historical narratives as content and critical thinking, debate and reflection as process, the forums are crucial to building sustainability of genocide education in the capital. They will build on the schools’ pre-existing education programs that were established using SRI/DC-Cam’s curriculum, and they will provide additional opportunities for student learning as well as teacher mentoring. The following are main objective of the forum:

1. To provide students with an opportunity to share and express their personal knowledge on what happened during the DK regime.
2. To let students think critically on the transitional consequences of this legacy of the current Cambodian society.
3. To encourage discussion over this legacy in families and communities.
4. To distribute Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) textbooks to participating students.

The classroom forum at Prek Eng high school was led by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy with assistance from his program coordinators including Ms. Min Sanas and Mr. VengSeanghai in addition with an international intern from America, Mr. AnamayViswanathan, based on the following agenda:

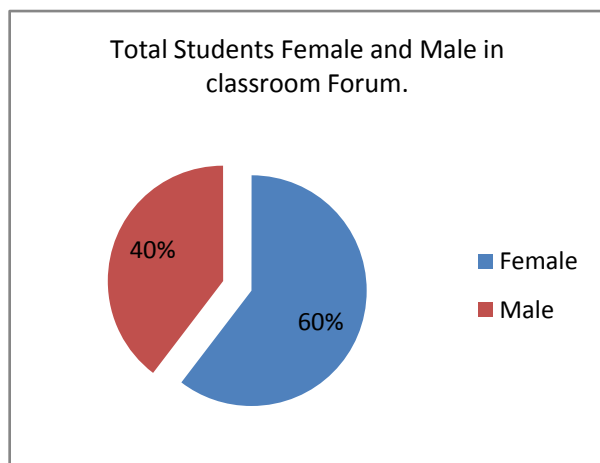


Activities	Times
Delivering pre-forum surveys to students	9:00 – 9:20
Evaluating students’ pre-existing knowledge through KWL chart	9:20 – 9:35
Presentation on the importance of studying the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)	9:35 – 10:00
Q & A session	10:00 – 10:15
Displaying “AnlongVeng Peace Tour” film	10:15 – 10:25
Delivering post-forum surveys to students	10:25 – 10:50
Distributing the textbooks “The History of Democratic Kampuchea(1975-1979)	10:50 –11:00

(Notice: These planned activities are subjective to change due to unexpected reality at the site.)

### III. Forum in Practice

#### 1. Participants and Stakeholders



The forum was joined by three main stakeholders including 53 students, 2 international observers (DC-Cam interns), Mr. AnamayViswanathan and Mrs. Fildza Nabila Aviantand Genocide Education team. However, what made it different was the non-participation from any teachers and director. They should have been unavailable due to their work. The students were all grade 12 students from

different classes, which means that it is now their ending year of high school. They are waiting for their exit state exam coming in few months ahead. As a result of this, students were more focusing on the forum because it gave them important information which is more likely to appear in the exam.

#### 2. Pre-forum Surveys and K-W-L Methodology





As usually and smoothly after the short opening speech, Mr. Pong-Rasy gave the floor to the two American and Indonesian observers so that they gave their impressions to the students. It seemed that students warmly welcomed to them, clapping hands out loud to say hello. This assumes that local students were more interested to learn and communicate with international students.

Then, all students were handed with pre-forum surveys which would take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The surveys helped the team know students' existing knowledge and experiences. Done behind the survey session, K-W-L method was implemented, undesirably, with students' hesitation to share what they *knew*. Only two or three students dared to stand up and shared the information, while most of them chose to stay still on the chair but discussed with their neighbors, which dedicates that most students were still not active and encouraged to talk to the team. Only few pieces of information on what they *knew* and *wanted* to know were noted on the whiteboard. L-column was written almost at the end of the forum at a purpose of letting students reflect what they have learnt. K-W-L method is found inefficient as it keeps students in a learning cycle where all inputs and outputs are actually given by students.

### 3. Documentary Play

A film on show to students was *AnlongVeng Peace Tour* made by DC-Cam/SRI's AnlongVeng Peace Center granted by GIZ. The film aimed at introducing Cambodian young generations toward tolerance and reconciliation at local and national levels by using peace tours as a mechanism to unlock the closed door which formerly blocked AnlongVeng community from the outsiders. People especially young students are brought to the community to learn its history and factual situations of the local.

Unlike the previous forums, to be liberal Rasy asked students whether they wanted to see the film before the presentation—the response was “Yes”. Thus, for this time the documentary *AnlongVeng Peace Tour* was played right after the K-W<sup>1</sup> section due to the urge strongly resisted

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<sup>1</sup> We note it as K-W because L section was to be done after the presentation when Rasy wrapped up all what students had learnt.



by the enthusiastic students. All were sitting in silence and focus on the film which was running for about 15 minutes. Afterward Rasy was trying to elicit students' perspective on the film and gave them the actual inspiration from the film.

#### 4. Presentation and Q & A

Following the documentary film, a narrative-based presentation was given by Rasy, lasting about 45-50 minutes. Basically it focused on the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) but in



Figure 1: Rasy is describing how Phnom Penh was liberated by the Khmer Rouge. Photo by DC-Cam.

more detailed format. Mr. Rasy delivered and elaborated such important matters of Khmer Rouge as the KR origin, Phnom Penh evacuation, S-21 tragedy, [slightly detailed] Cold War context in Indochina, and other KR atrocities. By and large, the presentation was done by a narrative mean and in response to

what students *wanted* to know in K-W-L section. However, a couple of problems happened from students' perspectives. A response to the fact that students were careless and sleeping during the presentation is that they already leant KH history at some levels in class. Thus, they would have been less interested to listen to the same stories, same narrative content. Those students behaved less collaboratively in the way they were asked to share knowledge and ask questions.<sup>2</sup>

Another problem occurred in relation to the content and images which should have been traumatizing some students. A case of S-21 torture methods is an example. Some students were

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<sup>2</sup> Phone interview with Pich Kung Srey Net on 21 June 2016: She added, "[...] the others would be less involved in sharing KR experiences because they already knew it before in class. They would find it as the same stories."





terrified by the cruel and inhumane view of how prisoners were tortured though it was not actual picture but painting. It is hard to measure how much they were affected psychologically.



Figure 2: Students looked at the image of S-21 in shock



Figure 3: Rasy was showing torture acts in S-21

A few questions were pointed out after the presentation from only two students. But this time, we received very remarkable questions from both negative and positive perspectives on Khmer Rouge government. It was different from previous time when only negative-perspective questions were asked. Those questions include:

- *What are positive legacies from the Khmer Rouge?*
- *Did the KR leader Pol Pot make any distribution to national development?*
- *How did the Khmer Rouge rise and decline?*
- *What did the Cambodians remember from the regime?*

### 5. Textbook Distribution



Figure 4: Student receiving a textbook, magazine, and information note

To close the forum, Cambodian-authored textbooks “*The History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*” were bestowed to all 53 students in addition with *Searching for the Truth* magazine and information note. The main purpose behind the distribution is giving students extra reading materials with factual information





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about Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, in some cases, students do not totally believe the oral history told by their parents and the community, so the textbook will serve as visual and conceptual evidence to prove the students of what really happened in the regime.

Complementarily, *Searching for the Truth* magazines in limited number are expected to help students see different personal stories from different victims and general information related to Khmer Rouge. Because Khmer Rouge context is broad, for those who want to learn things beyond textbook, they are given with an information note consisting of websites of different areas related to Khmer Rouge history, including the Tribunal Monitor, electronic volumes of magazine, and others.

The big picture of distribution of the textbook, magazines and electronic link notes is aimed at getting students to have enough materials to study KR history and encourage them to learn to read more before they go to university.

## IV. Surveys and Statistics

### Pre-Forum Survey

The pre-forum survey which was done at the beginning of the forum was aimed at eliciting students' existing knowledge and perspectives related to Khmer Rouge legacy and reconciliation. The question form was designed into 6 questions with multiple answers chosen upon their will.



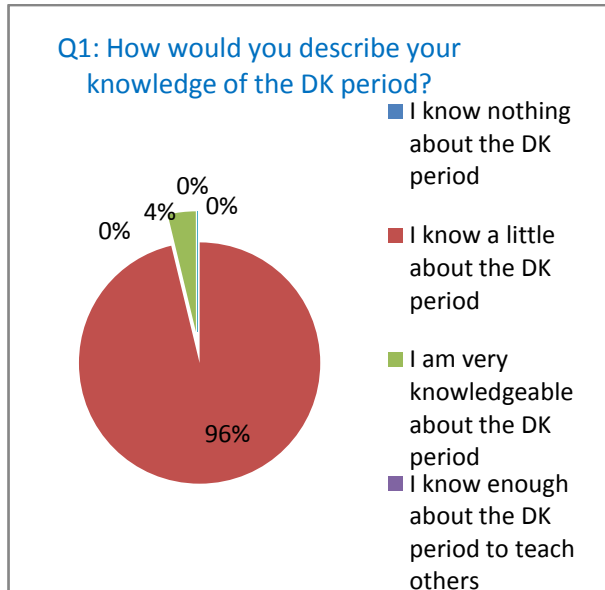


Figure 5: Pre-existing knowledge on DK history

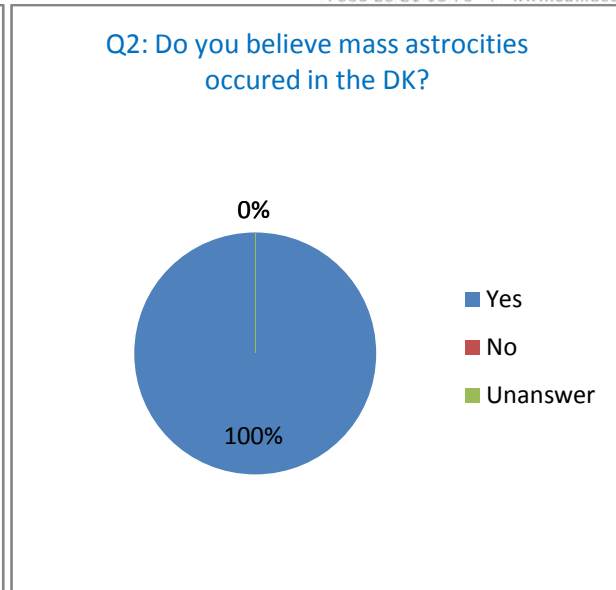


Figure 6: Belief in the existence of mass atrocities

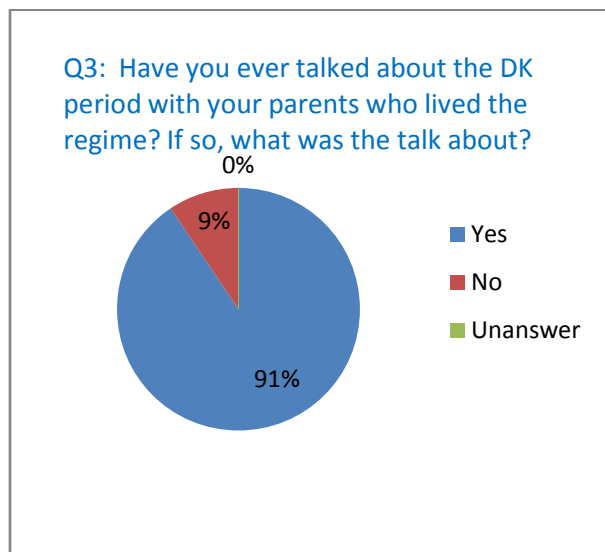


Figure 7: Students' talk about DK



Figure 8: Perspective on the importance of DK Education.



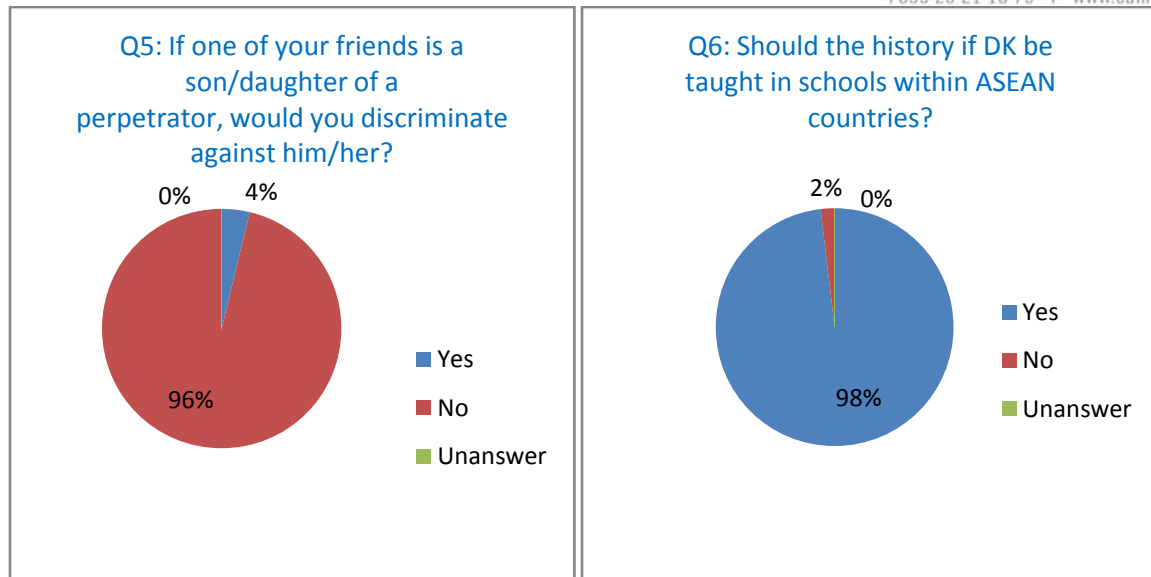


Figure 9: Perspective on Discrimination against KR

Figure 10: DK history curriculum in Asia

### Post-Forum Survey

The following are the findings by the post-forum survey designed to stimulate the new insights which the students have acquired by the end of the forum. The survey includes total 13 questions.



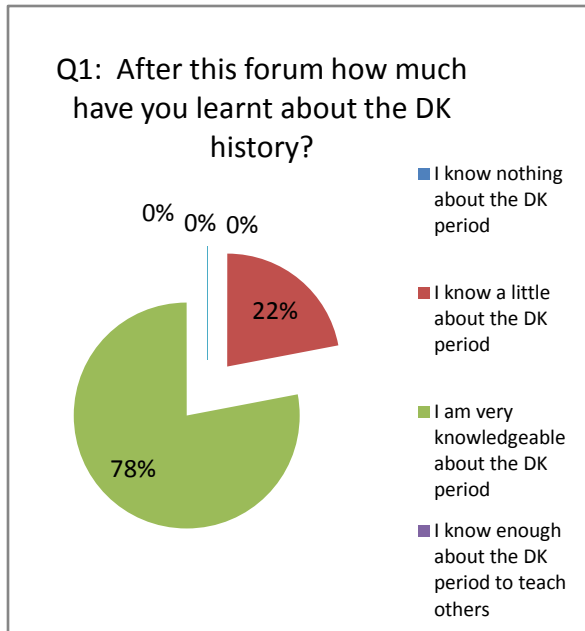


Figure 11: Student's new insights after the forum

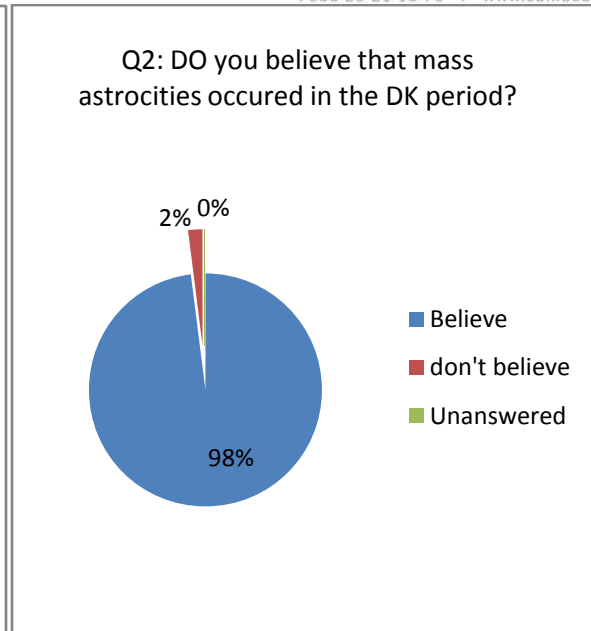


Figure 12: Students' belief in the existence of KR

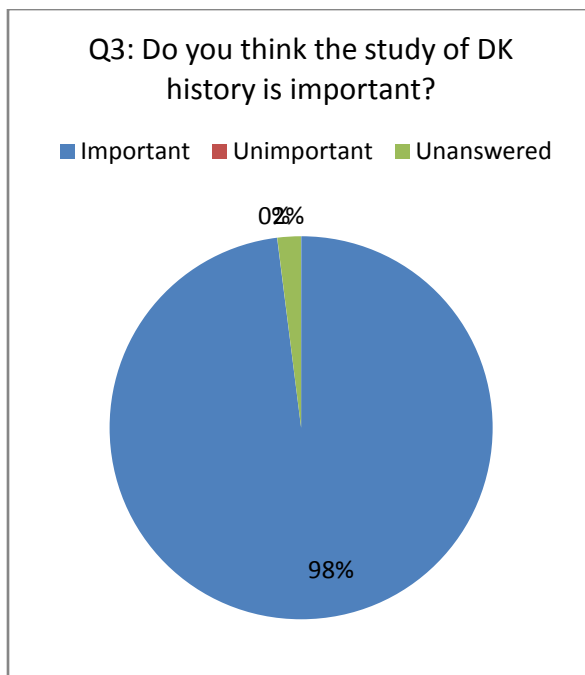


Figure 13: Perspective on the importance of DK study.

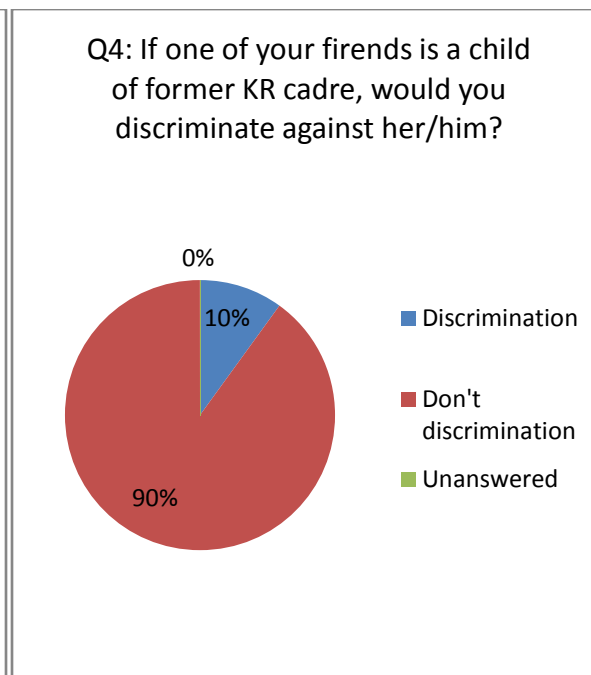


Figure 14: Perspective on KR children discrimination



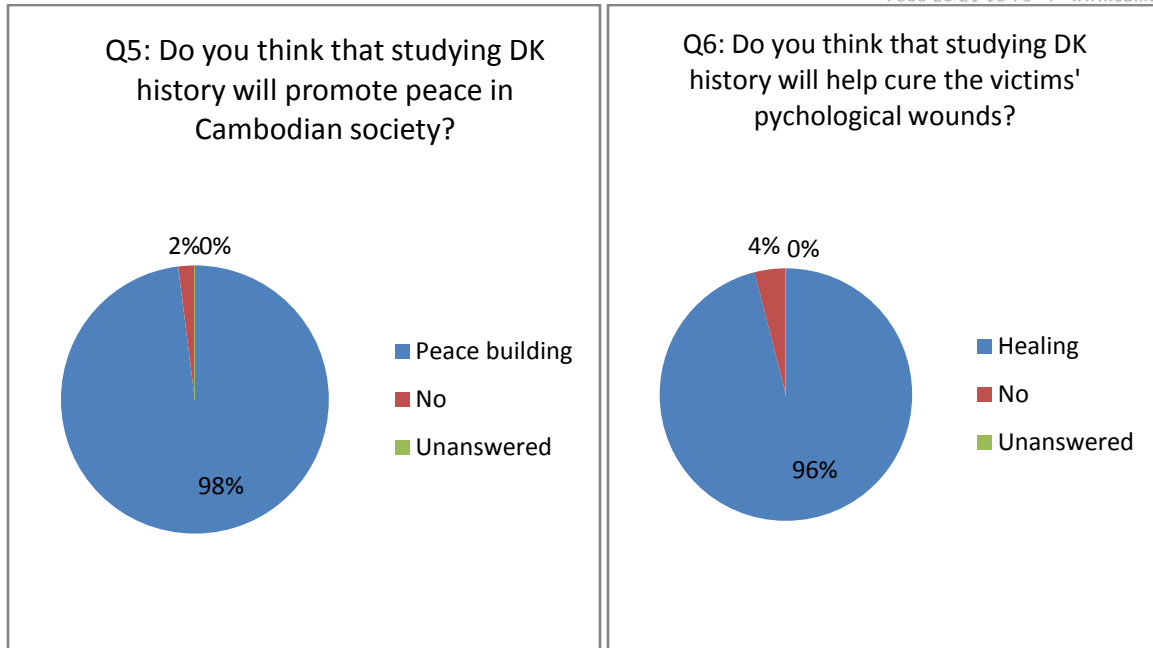


Figure 15: Perspective on peace building in Cambodia Figure 16: Perspective on victims' psychological recovery

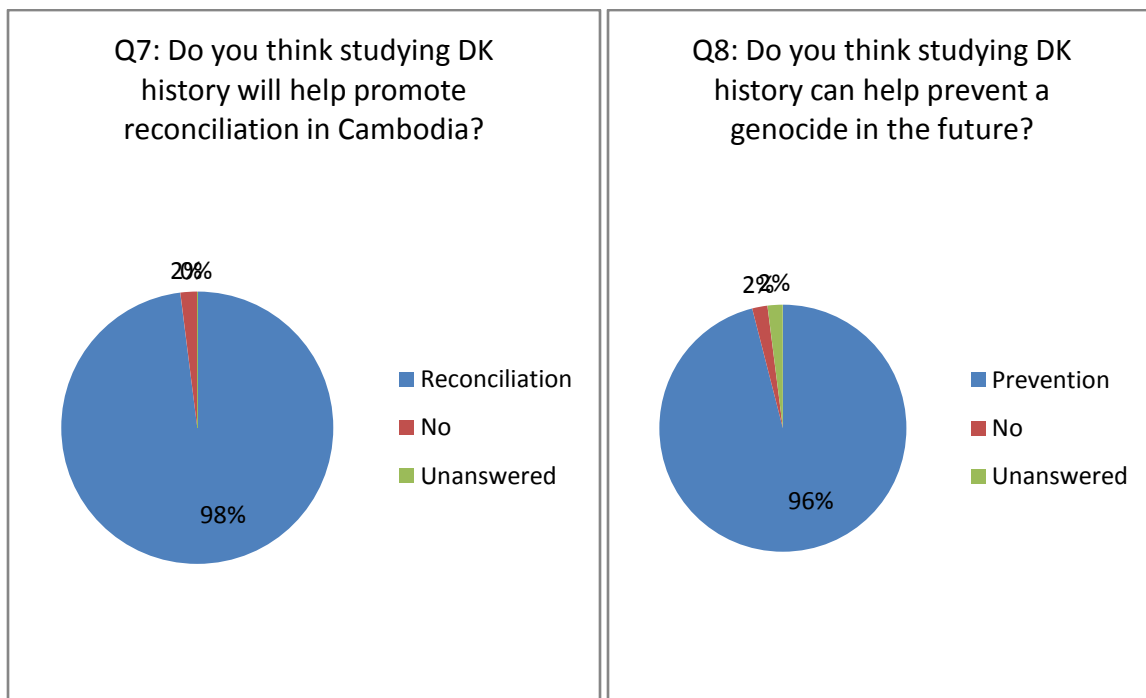


Figure 17: DK history and Reconciliation in Cambodia

Figure 18: DK history and genocide prevention



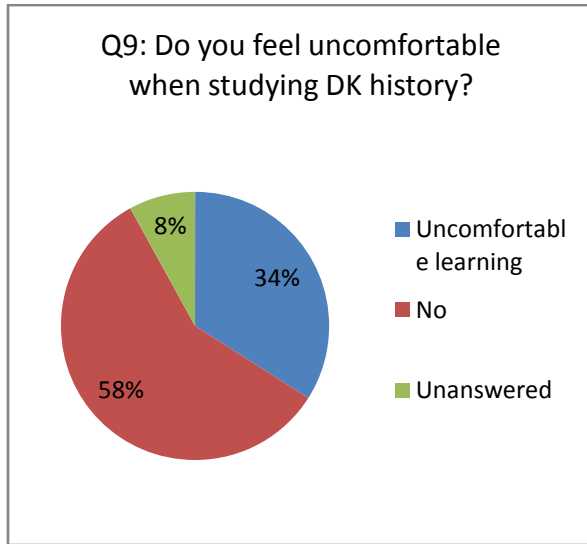


Figure 19: Personal feeling when studying DK history?

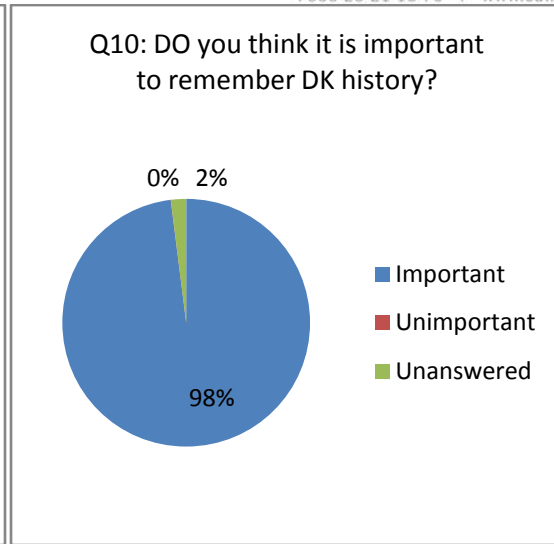


Figure 20: Importance of remembering DK history

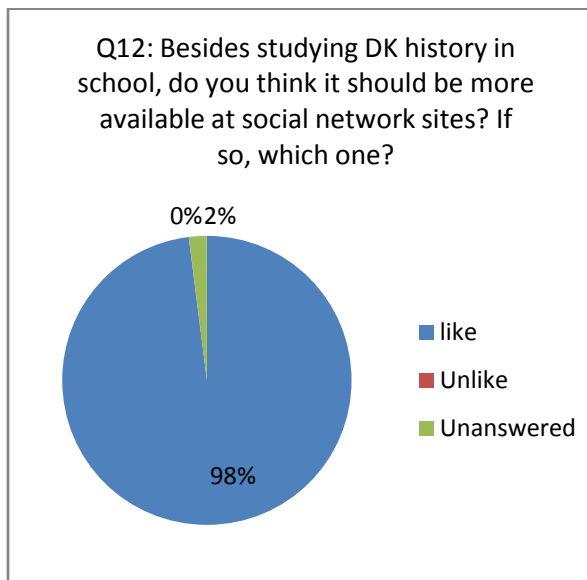


Figure 21: DK history and Social Network

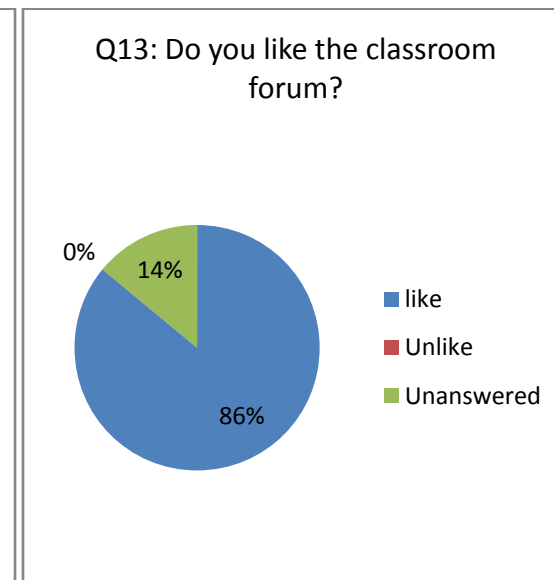


Figure 22: Students' interest in the forum





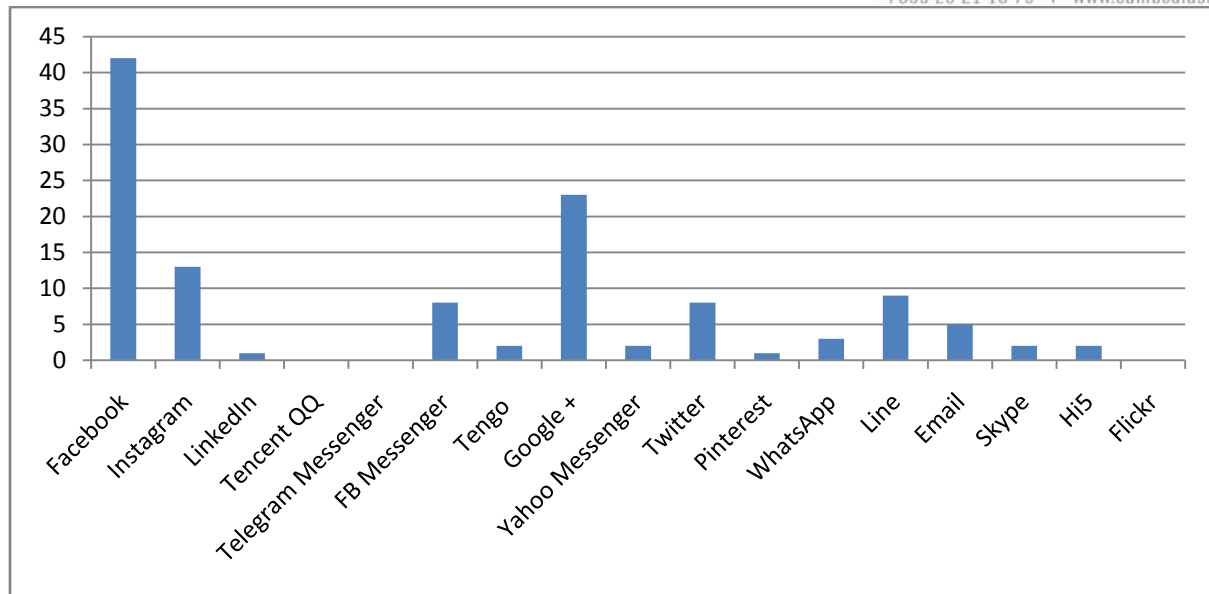


Figure 23: Different social network sites suggested for DK history study

## V. Data Analysis

The results from both surveys show a great shift in students’ knowledge about the Khmer Rouge. For post-forum survey, 78 per cent of students dedicate their “*much*” knowledge of KR, which is totally different from the pre-forum survey of 4 per cent rate on much knowledge. Before the forum starts, 96 per cent of students know a little about it, so it is good to see 78 per cent of students prove themselves of absorbing much knowledge afterward. However, a question would be asked “how” those students define the word “much” and “little”. The answer is subjectively based on individual students’ perspective.

In addition to students’ pre-post knowledge, it can be questionable to see students’ discriminative reaction towards former KR cadre’s children. Before the forum, 96 per cent of students choose *not* to discriminate against perpetrator’s children while the rest 4 per cent respond to hold discrimination. Surprisingly, the post-forum survey reveals a great reversal which may harm culture of tolerance and reconciliation due to the increased number of students with



discrimination. Up to 10 per cent of them (6 per cent added) respond to discriminate against former KR cadre's children.

For an instance in per-forum survey (see Fig 9), the student ticks “yes” while writing on the comment box, “*It is because we are Khmer next generation. We should not discriminate them. It is their parents who committed the crime.*” Another student writes, “*They do not know about it [the crime]. They do not do like their parents.*” Another student writes, “*No discrimination brings about development to the country.*” To conclude, these comments give a fact that the students falsely select the item box while giving controversial comments beneath which are considered more reliable. The comments are from their head through hand, so it seems like they do not tend to discriminate against KR cadre's offspring.



Due to easy accessibility to smart device, students urge for available information of DK history online—on different social network website (See Fig. 21/23). Facebook stands the first rank as the most popular site better for information transfer, Google+ the second and Instagram the third.

Figure 24: A student using her Ipad to capture slide presentation



## VI. Success Stories

### Proactive Method for Confidence Building amongst Students



Figure 25: Sreynet is standing up to give a talk to the forum while Rasy is asking some more relevant questions.

Pich Kung Sreynet, 18 years old, a grade twelve student at PrekEng high school: She is the only one female student willing to stand up and share her KR-related knowledge to the forum whereas the other students remain no response. When asked during phone interview afterward, Sreynet tells the Genocide Education team, “*Actually I was nervous*

*to talk [...] In class my teacher usually gives only lectures, so students do not really have chance to talk especially about Khmer Rouge history. [...] I feel that the forum motivates students to be more confident in talking and sharing knowledge at the stage.*”<sup>3</sup> Throughout this significant response, it can be seen that Cambodian education system still sees a challenge of passive students who are unwilling to talk and share things with their teachers. In line with Khmer traditional principals for 4 characters of learners as *Listen-Think-Ask-Note* (ស្តាប់. គិត. ប្រ. ចាំ), what students need prior to *Ask* is their encouragement and confidence being built through this forum.

Traditional teaching style, teacher-based methodology, is still a challenge to educational change toward new dimension of students-based methodology. This means that students, in some extend, are being habituated as passive learners who choose not to share a matter with others

<sup>3</sup> Phone interview is done to four different students a few days after the forum. The samples are chosen upon their behaviors whilst the forum: with much and less attention, so that we could seek further reaction from students.



despite understanding the matter for sure. It would be undesirable when younger Cambodian generations are not confident enough at the stage in public speaking, remaining passive and introverted. Sreynet adds that she really appreciates the value of the forum which gives a chance to students to talk and discuss KR matters especially with participation from international students. *“I think [local] students should have a discussion with them [Mr. Anamay and Mrs. Fildza]... But most students have a problem of language barrier. So you [Seanghai] should serve as a translator [laugh].”*Sreynet adds.

On another different matter, in addition to confidence building effort, the classroom education forum serves as a *“catalyst”* fastening and activating students’ intellectual and cognitive ability. *“[...] given a chance to talk, I think students will think even more flexibly and quickly.”* Sreynet adds more. To drawn an overall conclusion, the forum produces a successful achievement beyond its core objective by encouraging students to be extroverted and self-confident learners. It is a small outreach but serves a long-term impact of significance for students.

**Both-Side Perspective of Tolerance:** It is one-in-a-million case to have a student ask questions related to positive consequences and development back then during Khmer Rouge regime. But



Figure 26: Sen Rithya is asking multiple questions to Rasy in Q & A section.

SenRithya is the one. He raised interesting questions, considered a bit unusually from other students’ perspective. *“What are positive consequences remained from Khmer Rouge regime?”* He adds, *“Did Pol Pot make any distributions to nationaldevelopment?”*

Within a deeper sense, Rithya





learns not only negative legacy of Khmer Rouge atrocities but also positive concerns about Khmer Rouge, which drives the discussion even more interesting in the way it trains students to think critically by accumulating all information from different perspectives/corners.

From others' perspective, Rithya would sound a bit unusual to ask such questions, but it does not mean his friends dislike him or consider him in a bad way. Instead it would allow them to learn from different eye-opening idea from him. When asked whether she holds negative perception about Rithya, Pich Kung Sreynet says, “[...] *It does not mean we do like what he is asking. We just feel stunning by the questions. We are always friends.*”<sup>4</sup>

## VII. Conclusions

Classroom Education forum at PrekEng high school reveals a successful accomplishment despite certain errors mainly about questionnaire used. In terms of facilities and preparation, DC-Cam's Genocide Education team enjoys nice collaboration with the local high school staff who gives off their effort to get things ready in advance. Nothing went wrong during the operation excepting for a short delay of slide presentation due to not-working slide projector. However, things went smoothly as usual after being fixed up. Though most students are passive to question and share experience, there are two key students who always stand up asking questions and work cohesively. What satisfies us about the forum is that student, more than receiving insights about DK, are able to acquire further capabilities—they have chance to be more active in speaking to the public and sharing ideas; they can learn to think *critically* from different aspects. Also, students are handed with visual information source (DK textbooks) and relevant websites. They

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<sup>4</sup> Phone interview with Pich Kung Sreynet after the forum: She was asked about her idea regarding to Rithya' questions for positive legacy from Khmer Rouge.





are even more convinced of DK legacy by those sources as the concern of the decline in parental oral history telling. Therefore, it partly enhances the suitability of Khmer Rouge study.

## VIII. Recommendations

- ***Hooking up at first sight:*** To give a very good impression, at the beginning of the forum we should do an activity which seems more interesting to hook students with us. It is suggested to have one or two students to come in the front for sharing what they knew and heard about Khmer Rouge and what their parents told them about it.



Figure 27: A student sleeping during the presentation

- ***More interesting discussion:*** Given the fact that students already learnt most of the presentation content in class, they would feel bored and less interested to listen to the same things. Also, narrative methodology does not work well in some circumstances.

Because there are diversities of students with different learning styles, it is hard to match the narrative mythology commonly used with all students. For an example of the sleeping student above, she may find it less interesting to listening narration by slide presentation. Probably, like this student, some other students prefer learning styles. Therefore, it is recommended to have different teaching methodologies such as plays or comparative games afterward. Still timeframe and activeness remain the biggest challenges.

